

THE FREE-AGENCY OF CHRIST

NO. 2761

A SERMON
INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, JANUARY 12, 1902
DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON
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*“And he cometh to Bethsaida; and they bring a blind man unto him, and besought him to touch him.
And he took the blind man by the hand, and led him out of the town;
and when he had spit on his eyes, and put his hands upon him, he asked him if he saw ought.
And he looked up, and said, I see men as trees, walking.
After that he put his hands again upon his eyes, and made him look up:
and he was restored, and saw every man clearly.”*
Mark 8:22-25

THERE is a very wonderful variety in the miracles of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the variety is apparent even in the way in which men come to Him to partake of His blessing. With regard to the blind men to whom our Lord gave sight, we read of some that they were brought to Christ by their friends, as in the case of this man at Bethsaida, who was almost passive all the way through. His friends appear to have had more faith than he himself had, and therefore, they brought him to Jesus. There were other cases in which the blind men cried to Christ, and as far as they could, came to Him of themselves. Some of them even came to Him in the teeth of stern opposition, for when the disciples upbraided one of them for crying out so loudly, he cried out the more a great deal, “Thou Son of David, have mercy on me.”

So that, you see, some were brought to Christ by their friends, and others came to Him in spite of much opposition. Then there is that notable case, which many of you must remember, of that remarkable blind man, who had been blind from his birth, to whom Jesus came uninvited. Jesus saw him, and anointed his eyes with the clay which He had made, and then bade him go and wash in the pool of Siloam. “He went his way therefore, and washed, and came seeing.” Thus, from the very commencement of our Savior’s earthly ministry, there were differences in the way in which one class of characters, the blind, came to Jesus Christ.

I. The lesson for us to learn from this undoubted fact is, just this, that THERE ARE GREAT DIFFERENCES IN THE WAY IN WHICH MEN COME TO JESUS CHRIST, and differences even in their first desires.

Some will begin to seek the Savior like merchantmen seeking goodly pearls and when they have found him, He will be the pearl of great price to them. Others will be like the ploughman whose ploughshare struck against a crock of gold, they will know Christ’s value as soon as they stumble upon Him, as it were, and will be ready to sell all that they have, and buy the field, that the treasure may be theirs. Some of you who are here may get a blessing instantaneously, though you have not come specially seeking it. Others of you may have come here for months and years, seeking the Savior, and you may find Him now.

Some may begin to seek even while the sermon is progressing, but may not find Christ for a while, while others will no sooner seek Jesus than they will at once find Him. Some will be brought by the example of the godly, some by the preaching of the minister, some by a kind word from a friend, many by parental exhortations, some by a holy book, some by no outward means at all, some simply by their own thoughts in solitude, or at the dead of night—all led by the one gracious Spirit of God, but each one brought to Christ in a different way, and by different means from all the rest.

I think that the same divergence will be found, not only at the beginning of the Christian life, but also all the way through that life in all who are the subjects of divine grace. All Christian men are like each other in some respects, but no one Christian man is exactly like another in all points. There is, often, a great family likeness in the children in one family. Sometimes, you might go where there are ten or twelve, and you might pick them all out, and say, "Yes, we are quite sure that they all belong to this family, there are certain distinctive features which evidently show that they belong to these parents."

After you have noticed that resemblance, take the ten or twelve children, one by one, and look at them individually. Perhaps, at first sight, you might say that you did not know one from the other, but those who see them day by day will tell you that there are distinct differences of countenance and contour about each one, and idiosyncrasies of character which distinguish them from one another, so that there is not one of them who is exactly like the rest.

Now, it would be a great pity if they should all begin to wish that they were exactly like some one in the family whom they set up as a model. It would be a right and proper ambition that every son should wish to be like a godly father, and that every daughter should seek to imitate a lovely and gracious mother, but that one girl should wish to be just like her sister, or a boy to be exactly like his brother, would be absurd, yet have I often seen that absurdity in the church of God.

One is depressed because his experience is not quite like his neighbor's, another because he sees that there are points in his experience that are unlike anybody else's, and I have even known them go and try to remove their names from God's register, and unchristianize themselves, and what is worse, sometimes unchristianize one another, because they are not all exactly run into the same mold, like so many shot, precisely alike in form and shape, as manufactured articles are when they come quickly from under the die. No, we fall into grievous error when we entertain this kind of idea. God's ways are diverse, from the beginning to the end, God the Father, God the Holy Spirit, and our Lord Jesus Christ, act sovereignly, and do not choose to follow one particular mode of action in every case.

That lesson I wish to teach, first, *in reference to our prayers*. We must not attempt to dictate to God with regard to His answers to our prayers. Let us learn that lesson from the incident before us, "They bring a blind man unto him, and besought him"—"to open his eyes"? No, that would have been a very proper prayer, but they "besought him to touch him." But Christ did not do His work according to their request, "He took the blind man by the hand, and led him out of the town; and when he had spit on his eyes, and put his hands upon him, he asked him if he saw aught."

Now, with regard to our prayers, we may bring our children, and friends, and neighbors, to Christ, and we may ask that they may be saved, but we must not dictate to Christ the methods by which salvation is to come to them, for it is very usual with Him not to follow those means which we would prescribe to him. That plan of touching the sick person was a very common one with Christ, and therefore the people began to expect that He must always heal by a touch. Naaman thought that the prophet Elisha would come out to him, "and stand, and call on the name of the Lord his God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper." But he was mistaken, as were those folk at Bethsaida.

It was a sort of understanding among them that Christ's touch was the usual method by which His cures were wrought, so they besought Him to touch their blind friend, but He would not give any support to that notion. If they thought that He wrought His miracles by putting His hands upon the sick, then He would not put His hands upon them, He would let them see that He was not bound to any particular method. If He had allowed them to cherish such an idea, probably their next step in error would have been that they would have said that it was an enchantment, a kind of performance, by certain passes and touches, as by a wizard or conjurer, through which Christ went in order to heal the sick.

Superstition can be very easily made to grow, and you and I, mark you, may think ourselves perfectly free from superstition, yet all the while, it may only have taken some other form from that in which it appears in other people. For instance, if the Lord is pleased to bless a certain preacher to the conversion of souls, you may settle it in your mind that, if you get your children to hear him, they will assuredly be saved. Yet it may not be the case, for the Lord has a thousand ways of saving souls, and He

is not tied to any one man as His agent or instrument. It may get to be a kind of superstitious notion that, in some one person alone, the power of converting others may rest. Or it may be that you say to yourself, "I was converted by reading such-and-such a book, if I get my boy to read that book, it will convert him, too." Yet it may have no influence whatever upon him, for the grace of God is not tied to any book, nor to any way of working that you choose to prescribe.

I should not wonder, my dear friends, if some of you have tried to tie the Lord down to your way of working. For instance, in your class in the Sunday school, it was the reading of a certain chapter in the Bible that brought one of your scholars to Christ, so, in order to bring the rest of them to the Savior, you get them to read that chapter. That may be all right, for the Lord can bless it to them if He pleases, but at the same time, you must remember that He is a Sovereign, and that, therefore, He will probably use other means in other cases.

You preached, dear friend, in the street, or in the chapel, and God blessed that sermon, so you have made up your mind that you will preach it a second time. I recommend you not to do so, for very likely it will hang fire if you do. If you begin to confide in the sermon, God will not bless it. I think it is often well to do with a good sermon as David did with Goliath's sword, he said that there was none like it, yet he did not keep it by him for constant use, but he laid it up before the Lord, then it was ready for the special occasion when it was required.

When God has blessed any sermon that I have preached, I do not make it a rule to preach it again, lest I might be led to put my trust in that sermon, or to have some confidence in the way in which I set forth the truth, rather than in the truth itself, though I never hesitate to preach the same sermon again and again if I feel that the Spirit leads me to do so. We must not, in our prayers, tie the Lord down to any particular means, for He can use what means He pleases, and He will do so whatever we may say. We may ask Him to open the blind man's eyes, but it is not our place to beseech Him to touch the blind man in order to effect His cure.

Notice, also, that Christ did not answer the prayer of these people in the place where they presented it. They brought the blind man to Him, and they evidently expected the Lord Jesus Christ to open His eyes there, but Jesus did not do so. "He took the blind man by the hand, and led him out of the town," right away from the place where the people wanted to have the miracle performed. The Savior acted as though He could not do anything in the matter until He was out of the town, and He would not speak a word to him till He got him quite away by himself.

Well, now, it is very easy, in our prayers, to fix upon a certain place as the one where God will give His blessing, and to think, "The friend I am praying for must be converted in the Tabernacle, or must be converted in the little meeting that I hold in my house, or must be brought to Jesus Christ in the church where I attend, or in the chapel where I worship." But our Lord may, perhaps, never convert that young man in any one of the places you have mentioned, He may meet with him behind the counter, or on board ship, or walking by the way, or on a sick-bed. Do not be disappointed, therefore, when your place does not prove to be God's place. Take your friend to the house of God, for Christ's miracles on a Sabbath day and in the synagogue, are frequent, but do not try to tie Him down to the synagogue, for He must be left at liberty to work His miracles in His own way.

Neither, dear friends, must we, for a moment, try to tie the Lord Jesus Christ down *to work in our particular manner*. I have no doubt that these people meant to prescribe to Christ that He should open that man's eyes directly. He had done so before, and He was able to make the sightless one see in a single moment, and they, therefore, naturally expected that He would do it. But the Savior did not do so, He did not work an immediate, but a progressive cure. He opened the man's eyes a little, and afterwards opened them more fully. This was a very extraordinary miracle, there is no other case like it in Scripture. All the other cures that Christ wrought were immediate, but this one was progressive.

So, my brother, the Lord may hear and answer your prayer, but it may not be by a conversion in the way you expected. You thought that, on a sudden, you would hear that your dear friend had been turned from darkness to light. You have not heard that, but you have heard that he begins to be more thoughtful

than he used to be, and that he attends the means of grace more regularly than he formerly did. Perhaps the Lord intends, in his case, to work salvation by degrees. Do not you go, and run the risk of spoiling it by trying to run faster than God guides you. The daylight does not always come in a moment. I am told that, in the tropics, there is but slender notice of the rising of the sun, he seems to be up, and shining in full glory in a few seconds, but here, in England, you know how long a time of twilight and dawn we have before the sun has fully risen.

No doubt, there are conversions that are just like the tropical morning, in a moment, the great deed of grace is done, but there are many more conversions that are slow and gradual, yet they are none the less sure. The genial sun is up when he is up—even if he takes an hour in the operation of rising—quite as effectually as he is up when he seems to leap out of the sea into meridian splendor, so, if the Lord should see fit to bless your friend in a different manner from that which you had thought of, do not you quarrel with Him. Whatever He does is right, so let us never question any of His actions.

One other point, in which we must not dictate to God, is this. *He may hear our prayer, and grant our request, yet we may not know that it is so.* I do not think that these people, who brought the blind man to Christ, ever saw him again after his eyes had been opened. Mark tells us that Christ “led him out of the town,” that is, away from his friends, and after he had healed him, “he sent him away to his house, saying, Neither go into the town, nor tell it to any in the town.” I suppose they found it out afterwards, but there and then, at any rate, they did not see the man’s eyes opened. If he did as Christ commanded him, he went straight away home, and kept the matter quiet, so far, at least, as the general public, and perhaps these friends of his also, were concerned.

Now, it is quite possible that God may hear your prayer for some dear friend in whom you are interested, and yet you may never know of it till you get to heaven. The Lord has promised to hear prayer, but He has not promised that you shall know that He has heard your prayer. A godly mother may be in glory long before her supplications have been answered in the conversion of her son. A Sunday school teacher may go home to be with Christ before the boys, over whom he has agonized, are brought to the Savior. Our farmers know that earthly harvests are sometimes late, and it is the same in spiritual husbandry. Grace ensures the crop, but even the grace of God does not guarantee that the crop shall come up tomorrow, nor just whenever we please.

So, dear friend, keep on sowing the good seed of the kingdom, water it with thy tears and thy prayers, and then leave with God the question whether you shall see the harvest, or not. He may, in your case, fulfill that gracious promise, “He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him,” or He may choose to make you simply the sower, and another the reaper. It is for you to believe that your petitions shall be granted, even if you do not live to see it.

There have been many instances, in which men’s prayers have prevailed, although they themselves have never lived to see that happy result. I think I have told you before now, the story of a godly father, whose unhappy lot it was to see his sons grow up without the fear of God in their hearts, and this was a very heavy burden upon the good old man’s spirit. Day and night he wept and prayed about it before God. At last, the time came for him to die, and he had not then one son or daughter who had found the Savior. It had been the old man’s prayer that his death might be the means of the conversion of his children if they were not brought to Christ in his lifetime, and so it was.

Yet the scene at his death was very different from what he had hoped that it might be, for it was a very gloomy departure. His faith was grievously tried, he did not enjoy the light of God’s countenance, he was put to bed, as God often puts some of his best children to bed, in the dark. He died humbly trusting in Jesus, but not triumphing, not even rejoicing, he was in great pain of body, and deep depression of spirit, and his last thought was, “This experience of mine will only confirm my sons in their infidelity. I have borne no witness for Christ, as I had hoped to do, and now they will say that their father’s religion failed him at the last, and so, my heart’s desire will not be granted to me.”

Yet it was granted, though he did not live to see it, for after they had put him in the tomb, and had come home from the funeral, the eldest son said to the others, “You noticed, brothers, what a struggle our father seemed to have on his dying bed, and how hard it went with him. Now, we all know that he was a man of God, his conduct and example were such that we have no doubt about his being a true Christian, yet if he found it so hard to die, what will it be for us when we come to the day of our death, and have no God to help us, and no Christ to look to in the hour of our extremity?” It was remarkable that the same thought had struck all the good man’s sons, and they went to their own homes, deeply impressed by their father’s gloomy death, to seek their father’s God, and to find him. Could the old man have known what was best, he would have chosen just such a death in order that he might thereby, be the means of bringing his children to Christ.

In like manner, you may not be sure that you will see here, the answer to all your prayers, but you will see it when you get up yonder, when God shall bid you fling up the celestial windows, and you will look down, and see the harvests which you never reaped, but for which you sowed the seed. You will see upspringing from the soil, the rich result of your labor, though you saw it not while here on earth, and your heaven will be all the sweeter because then you will know that the Lord has heard and answered the prayers that you offered in your lifetime here below.

II. Secondly, I learn, from this narrative, that WE MUST NOT ATTEMPT TO TELL THE LORD JESUS CHRIST HOW HE IS TO WORK, for He has various ways of working in the blessing of men.

For instance, when this blind man was brought to Him, He *did not open his eyes with a word*. Often, when the sick were brought to Him, He spake, and they were at once cured. He might have done so in this case, He might have said, to the blind man’s eyes, “Be opened!” The ancient fiat might have been repeated, “Light be!” and there would have been light in his darkness. But there came out of Christ’s mouth—not a word, but spittle! Christ spat on the blind man’s eyes. Ah! but if anything comes out of His mouth, it does not matter much what it is, whatever comes out of the mouth of the Christ of God means healing and life to those whom it reaches.

He has His own ways of working. Usually He is pleased to save men by the preaching of the Word, and sometimes, the great change is brought about through very feeble testimony, yet nevertheless, it is the Word of the Lord that is spoken, and it comes from the mouth of God, so He blesses it to the opening of blind men’s eyes.

In this case, too, *Christ did not work upon this man all at once*. As I have already reminded you, He wrought a gradual cure upon him. So, dear friend, you must not yourself dictate to Jesus Christ as to how you will be saved. I know that some of you do. One said to me, in my vestry, that she believed she had found Christ, but she was half-afraid it could not really be so. “Why not?” I asked, and she answered, “My old grandfather told me that it took him three years before he got peace, and he was locked up in a lunatic asylum most of the time. I thought it was an awful affair altogether.” I inquired where she could find anything in the Word of God to support that idea, and then told her simply to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and not to trouble about what her grandfather did. I have no doubt that he got to heaven even through a lunatic asylum, but there are other and better ways of getting there.

Mr. Bunyan tells us that his pilgrim went through the Slough of Despond, and did not pick the steps well, so he floundered, and it was with difficulty that he got to the other side. Mr. Bunyan pictures Evangelist as bidding the poor seeker fly towards a certain wicket gate, and keep his eye on the light within that gate. Now, that was a mistake on the part of Evangelist, and it was through that mistake that the poor pilgrim got into the Slough of Despond.

The Gospel does not tell you to look out for wicket gates, nor to keep your eye on any light. You remember how at last, the poor pilgrim did get rid of his burden, it was at the cross that the burden rolled from his shoulders, and disappeared into the sepulcher so that he saw it no more, and dear friends, that is where your eye has to be turned—to the cross of Christ, and to the full atonement He has made for all who trust in Him.

As for wicket gates, and the Slough of Despond, the less you have to do with them, the better. “But is there no Slough of Despond?” someone asks. Oh, yes! twenty of them, but it is far easier to go through that Slough with the burden off rather than on your shoulders. The best thing you can possibly do is to go to Christ first, for then you can better go wherever you have to go. As for me, I would rather avoid the Slough of Despond altogether if I could, and keep my eye ever upon the cross, for Christ crucified is the one and only hope of sinners.

You must not any of you say, “Bunyan went through the Slough of Despond, according to his ‘Grace Abounding,’ he was there for years, and there is our Pastor, I have often heard him say that he was along while in that Slough.” Yes, I am sorry to say that he was, but that is no reason why you should go there. If, when I was a youth, I had heard the Gospel of Christ preached as plainly as I have preached it to you, I feel certain that I should never have been in the bog so long as I was. But I heard a mixed sort of Gospel, a mingle-mangle—a mixture of law and Gospel—a muddling up of Moses and Christ—something of “do” and something of “believe,” and therefore, I was for so long a time in that sad state of bondage.

In fact, the good sound-doctrine people that I used to hear said, “You must not come to Christ, for you do not know whether you are one of the elect, and you must not come until you do.” I know perfectly well that nobody can possibly tell whether he is elect or not, till he finds it out by coming to God, and that no one ever comes to God the Father, who makes the election, except by Jesus Christ His Son. So we have first to do with the Son, and afterwards with the Father. That I did not know when I was seeking the Savior. I wanted an angel to tell me that I was one of the elect, but I was obliged to come to Christ, as a poor, guilty sinner, and just trust in Him, and so to find peace in believing.

That is the plan that I should recommend you to adopt if you want to be saved. Do not say, “I shall not come to Christ till I stick in the mud of the Slough of Despond, I shall not come to Him till I get laid by the heels in Giant Despair’s Castle, I shall not come to Him till I get whipped on the back with the ten-thonged lash of the law.” If you really want to have that lash, perhaps you will get it, and I hope you will like it, but the Gospel says, “Come and welcome! Come and welcome! Come to Jesus just as you are!” Never try to lay down rules and regulations for Christ, but let Him save you in His own way, and be you content, just as you are, to take Him just as He is.

There is one more point about this man in which the singular sovereignty of Christ is seen, and that is, He *did not make use of the healed man*, though we should have thought that He would have done so. If this miracle had been wrought in the present day, we should soon have seen this man in the Salvation Army, or in some other public position. Nowadays, the rule seems to be, send off a paragraph to the newspapers, “So many in the inquiry-room, so many converted on such-and-such a night. Blow the trumpets! Beat the drums! Let everybody know!” But that was not Jesus Christ’s way of working, He told this man not to go into the town, and when he did get home, not to tell anybody what had been done to him.

Why was he not to tell anybody? Well first, because the Lord wanted to do good, and not to have a noise made about it, and secondly, because there was no need to tell anybody. Suppose I had been for years a blind preacher, and that my eyes had been opened, would there be any need for me to tell you next Sunday that my eyes were opened! You would see it for yourselves, everybody can see when a man’s eyes are opened, and often, the best way in which a man can tell that he is converted is simply by letting other people see what a change there is in him, because if his eyes are not really open, it is of no use for him to stand up and say, “Bless the Lord! my eyes are open,” while he is still blind.

I have heard people say that they were converted, and I have thought that, if the work were done over again, it would not hurt them much, and that indeed, six or seven such conversions would not amount to much. Oh, give us a conversion that speaks for itself! Give us a new heart that shows itself in a new life. If a man is not able to control his temper, or to speak the truth—if he is not a good servant, or a good master, or a good husband—do not let him think it necessary to proclaim what Christ has done for him, for if he has done anything that was worth doing, it will speak for itself.

Now I must close by just noticing one fact about this man as to the early steps that Jesus Christ used with him. There is one point I want to dwell upon for a minute. Our Lord, before He did aught else with the blind man, took him by the hand, and led him out of the town. There are some of you here, perhaps, with whom the Lord has been thus working, you have begun to come to listen to the Gospel—through your wife, perhaps, or through some Christian friend. I am very hopeful concerning you, for although you cannot yet see, the Lord has taken you by the hand. All the faith that this poor man had was a yielding faith, he gave himself up to be led, and that is a saving faith. My dear friend, give yourself up to be led by Christ now. If you have come under gracious, heavenly influences, yield yourself up to them.

The Master led this blind man right away from other people, and it will be a good sign when you begin to feel that you are getting to be lonely. Sometimes, when the Lord means to save a man, He lays him aside by illness, or if not, He takes him away from the company he used to keep by some other means, or if the man is allowed to go into the same company, he gets to dislike it. He does not feel at home with those who were once his boon companions, he goes in and out of the shop as if he were one by himself. He has the Lord's arrow sticking in him, and like the wounded stag he tries to get away to bleed alone. You feel sometimes, as though nobody understood you. You read in the Book of Job, or the Lamentations of Jeremiah, and you say, "This is the kind of experience that I am passing through. I have a broken heart, and a troubled conscience, and I feel that I am all alone."

Well, dear friend, that is the Lord Jesus Christ leading you out of the town, getting you away from everybody, and mark you, the place of mercy is the place where a man stands alone—away from everybody except his Lord. Do not draw your hand back from the hand that is leading you away. Perhaps ungodly company has been your ruin, and it is through solitude that God intends to save you. Be much alone, think over your own case. Make a personal confession of sin. Seek for personal faith in a personal Savior. You were born alone, you will have to pass through the gates of death alone. Although you will stand in a crowd to be judged, yet you will be judged as a separate individual, and even though myriads perish with you, your loss will be your own if you are lost. Therefore, look into your own affairs, cast up your own account, and before the living God, stand separate from all your fellow-men.

I believe that, if any of you have reached that point, you are where the deed of grace shall be done. May the Lord enable you to yield yourself up completely to Him, for your safety lies there! We rightly put faith before you as a look, but now I will put it before you, if you have not even an eye to look with, as the yielding up of yourself to the guidance of the Savior. Be nothing, and let Christ be everything. Give yourself entirely up into His hands, and He must and will save you, for that, though it be faith in its passive form, is nevertheless a real and saving faith, and blessed are all they that have it. May God grant it to every one of us now, for Jesus' sake! Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON

MARK 8:1-30

Verses 1-4. *In those days the multitude being very great, and having nothing to eat, Jesus called his disciples unto him, and saith unto them, I have compassion on the multitude, because they have now been with me three days, and have nothing to eat: and if I send them away fasting to their own houses, they will faint by the way: for divers of them came from far. And his disciples answered him, From whence can a man satisfy these men with bread here in the wilderness?*

Why did they not ask their Master what He could do in such an emergency as that? After so much experience of His power as they had already had, it is wonderful that they did not refer the matter to Him and say, "Lord, thou canst feed the multitude, we beseech thee do it." But they did not act so wisely, instead, they began questioning about ways and means. "From whence can a man satisfy these men with bread here in the wilderness?"

5-9. *And he asked them, How many loaves have ye? And they said, Seven. And he commanded the people to sit down on the ground: and he took the seven loaves, and gave thanks, and brake, and gave to his disciples to set before them; and they did set them before the people. And they had a few small fishes: and he blessed, and commanded to set them also before them. So they did eat, and were filled: and they took up of the broken meat that was left seven baskets. And they that had eaten were about four thousand: and he sent them away.*

Christ is the great Master of the art of multiplication. However small is the stock with which we begin, we have only to dedicate it all to Him, and He will multiply and increase it until it will go far beyond our utmost expectations, and there will be more left after the feast is over than there was before it began. Bring your small talents, bring the little grace you have to Christ, for He can so increase your store that you will never know any lack, but shall have all the greater abundance the greater the demand that is made upon that store. Had these four thousand people not been miraculously fed by Christ, the seven loaves and the few small fishes would have remained just as they were, but now that the four thousand have to be fed, the loaves and fishes are multiplied by Christ in a very extraordinary manner, so that in the end, there is far more provision than they had at the beginning.

Expect, beloved, to be enriched by your losses, to grow by that which looks as if it would crush you, and to become greater by that which threatens to annihilate you. Only put yourself into Christ's hands, and He will make good use of you, and leave you better than you were before He used you as the means of helping and blessing others.

10-12. *And straightway he entered into a ship with his disciples, and came into the parts of Dalmanutha. And the Pharisees came forth, and began to question with him, seeking of him a sign from heaven, tempting him. And he sighed deeply in his spirit, and saith, Why doth this generation seek after a sign? verily I say unto you, There shall no sign be given unto this generation.*

Unbelief always pricked Him to the heart, and greatly grieved Him. When men trusted Him, He delighted to exhibit His matchless grace, but when they caviled and questioned, His heart was heavy, and He turned away from them.

13. *And he left them, and entering into the ship again departed to the other side.*

But alas! even on board that little ship there was unbelief, and from the small and select circle of His own disciples He had fresh reason for sorrow from the same cause.

14-21. *Now the disciples had forgotten to take bread, neither had they in the ship with them more than one loaf. And he charged them, saying, Take heed, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, and of the leaven of Herod. And they reasoned among themselves, saying, It is because we have no bread. And when Jesus knew it, he saith unto them, Why reason ye, because ye have no bread? perceive ye not yet, neither understand? have ye your heart yet hardened? Having eyes, see ye not? and having ears, hear ye not? and do ye not remember? When I brake the five loaves among five thousand, how many baskets full of fragments took ye up? They say unto him, Twelve. And when the seven among four thousand, how many baskets full of fragments took ye up? And they said, Seven. And he said unto them, How is it that ye do not understand?*

Can we not learn from past experience? If the Lord has helped us before, is He not equally ready to help us again? What! when there are only a few of you disciples on board ship, do you begin to distrust your Lord because you have only one loaf, when he found enough food for five thousand and for four thousand out of a few scanty loaves? O ye unbelieving children of God, what infinite patience your gracious God has with you, though you so often and so shamefully doubt Him! "Do ye not remember?" "How is it that ye do not understand?" Can it be that all your Lord's lessons of love and deeds of kindness have taught you nothing? Do you still doubt Him—still distrust Him? Has He delivered you in six troubles, and can you not trust Him in the seventh? Has He kept you by His grace, till you are seventy years of age, and can you not trust Him for the few remaining years of your earthly pilgrimage? Oh, shame upon us that we are such dull scholars in the school of Christ!

22-26. *And he cometh to Bethsaida; and they bring a blind man unto him, and besought him to touch him. And he took the blind man by the hand, and led him out of the town; and when he had spit on his eyes, and put his hands upon him, he asked him if he saw aught. And he looked up, and said, I see men as trees, walking. After that he put his hands again upon his eyes, and made him look up: and he was restored, and saw every man clearly. And he sent him away to his house, saying, Neither go into the town, nor tell it to any in the town.*

“Your house is outside Bethsaida, so go round-about, and get home without going into the town, and if any of your neighbors call to see you, say nothing about me to them, for I wish to remain concealed for the present.”

27. *And Jesus went out, and his disciples, into the towns of Cesarea Philippi: and by the way he asked his disciples, saying unto them, Whom do men say that I am?*

It was Christ’s usual way, when He took a walk with His disciples, to beguile the time with holy conversation. It would be well if we always did the same. We might do much good, and we might get much good, if we made our Lord Jesus the theme of our talks “by the way.” It was an important question that He put to his disciples, “Whom do men say that I am?”

28-29. *And they answered, John the Baptist: but some say, Elias; and others, One of the prophets. And he saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am?*

“That is the main point. It matters little to you what other men say about me—whether they are right or wrong, may not concern you, but what is your own opinion? What do you know about me? ‘Whom say ye that I am?’”

29. *And Peter answereth and saith unto him, Thou art the Christ.*

“Thou art the Messiah.” We know from Matthew’s Gospel, that it was this confession of which our Lord said to Peter, “Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona,” son of Jonas—“for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.”

30. *And he charged them that they should tell no man of him.*

He wished, at that time, to remain in comparative retirement, He was not anxious that His miracles should be blazoned abroad. By and by, He was to die, and He preferred to derive His fame from His death rather than from His life, and to gather His honors from His cross rather than from His miracles. He never bade any man to be silent about His death on the cross, but when honor was likely to come to Him among men from His miracles, He frequently “charged them that they should tell no man of him.” That restriction is no longer in force, it was entirely abrogated after our Lord’s resurrection, when He said to His disciples, “All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen.”

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—235, 491, 538

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